

Enclosure

The EPA and the NOAA's Assessment of Oregon's Implementation-Ready TMDL Approach and the State's Progress in Addressing the Remaining Conditions on its Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program

1) Will the Implementation of the Implementation-Ready TMDLs, in the Mid-Coast Basin, Likely Result in Actions to Achieve and Maintain Water Quality Standards?

The ODEQ is in the process of evaluating the safe-harbor Best Management Practices (BMPs) needed to achieve and maintain water quality standards (WQSs). Absent these BMPs and a completed Mid-Coast IR-TMDL document, the EPA and the NOAA lack sufficient information to determine if the IR-TMDL approach is likely to result in actions that achieve and maintain WQSs. Based on the limited information and progress that Oregon has provided to date, we are concerned that the IR-TMDL approach might not enable the State to achieve and maintain water quality standards.

Although the ODEQ has fallen short of identifying specific BMPs and completing the Mid-Coast IR-TMDL document, the State has completed some necessary preliminary steps, such as establishing the geographic scope of the sediment IR-TMDL document and the numeric water quality targets for the TMDLs to address turbidity and biocriteria listings. To determine the scope of sediment problems in the Mid-Coast Basin, the ODEQ used PREDATOR and Stressor ID methodology to assess the biocriteria impairments caused by sediment. The ODEQ then determined percent fine sediment targets associated with the biological impairments to set numeric sediment water quality targets for biocriteria listings. The EPA and the NOAA believe this methodology is credible and establishes an important link between aquatic life use and water quality. The ODEQ also has begun drafting approaches to addressing the impacts from roads.

The federal coastal zone statute, however, requires state agencies, like the ODEQ, to develop and submit enforceable policies to achieve the Coastal Zone Act Reauthorization Amendments (CZARA) nonpoint source goals. The ODEQ has not yet presented the EPA and the NOAA with completed Mid-Coast IR-TMDLs, including examples of mandatory and enforceable BMPs, that, when implemented, would result in attainment of applicable WQSs. If the ODEQ chooses to allow the Designated Management Agencies (DMAs) to develop the BMPs, then the ODEQ needs to determine whether the BMPs submitted by the DMAs are adequate and, if not, the ODEQ would need to develop additional BMPs if DMA actions alone are not adequate to meet applicable WQSs. The process the ODEQ would use to make this assessment and potentially impose additional BMPs is not clear yet. In addition, it is not clear whether the ODEQ would incorporate the DMA-developed BMPs into the TMDL document. If the BMPs are not part of the TMDL document, then the TMDLs would be more representative of traditional TMDLs, rather than IR-TMDLs and likely would not enable Oregon to satisfy its Coastal Nonpoint Program condition absent any enforceable measure to ensure that the BMPs developed outside the TMDL process become enforceable.

2) *Will Oregon's Plan for Developing Implementation-Ready TMDLs throughout the Coastal Nonpoint Program Management Area Satisfy the Outstanding Condition on Additional Management Measures for Forestry for the State's Coastal Nonpoint Program?*

Based on what the ODEQ has presented to the EPA and the NOAA to date, we do not believe the current IR-TMDL approach is likely to satisfy the outstanding condition requiring additional management measures for forestry for Oregon's Coastal Nonpoint Program. In the findings of the EPA and the NOAA's 1997 conditional approval for Oregon's Coastal Nonpoint Program, we noted weaknesses in the State's ability to adequately address impacts from forest roads, as well as the State's ability to protect riparian and landslide prone areas, among other issues.

Although a conceptual forest road strategy that the ODEQ discussed with the EPA and the NOAA has the potential to satisfy those conditions, the ODEQ has not, to date, provided a required road strategy with any measure of specificity. Key elements of a viable forest road strategy that could address outstanding concerns include, but would not be limited to:

- development of an inventory/assessment to identify where impacts from forest roads exist;
- development of a reasonable timeline for retiring or restoring forest roads that cause adverse water quality impacts;
- development of a requirement to track and report on progress to remediate identified forest road problems. Implementation principles for the tracking program could include addressing the worst road problems or highest risk categories of road problems earlier in the overall timeline as well as milestone-based targets to ensure steady progress on identified road work; and
- identification of effective BMPs for road siting, construction, operation, maintenance, abandoning, and closing to ensure road stability; drainage of road runoff back to the forest floor rather than directly to streams and other waterbodies; and adequate protection of both fish and nonfish bearing streams. This BMP identification and development effort could include establishing targets for the maximum percentage of a road network allowed to discharge directly to streams and other waterbodies, or other similar targets. This identification should include expectations for periodic monitoring or inspections: to track BMP implementation; to determine if targets are being met; to assess BMP effectiveness; and to determine whether there is any need to adjust BMPs in the future.

The EPA and the NOAA are also concerned about Oregon's lack of progress identifying additional management measures for the protection of riparian and landslide prone areas. The Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) is not considering requirements for the protection of riparian areas around nonfish bearing streams in its current riparian rulemaking effort. It is not clear whether ODF will have developed adequate requirements for the protection of riparian areas around small and medium fish bearing streams through the ODF rulemaking process by the time the EPA and the NOAA have committed to make a final decision on the adequacy of Oregon's Coastal Nonpoint Program.

In addition, the ODEQ has not developed additional management measures for small and medium fish bearing streams or nonfish bearing streams in the IR-TMDL effort. A significant body of science supports increases in the levels of protection afforded to riparian areas around small and medium streams in Oregon. Increased no-cut buffers, higher tree retention targets, minimum canopy retention targets, and/or higher basal area targets are currently required on private forest land for similar forest types in the two adjacent coastal states.

Many practices are available that, in combination, could help Oregon meet the additional management measures for forestry condition by protecting riparian areas, reducing sediment loads, and addressing large wood and stream temperature issues. Those practices include, but are not limited to: buffering key segments of nonfish bearing streams that affect downstream water quality above confluences of nonfish bearing streams and fish bearing streams; buffering hollows, inner gorges, headwalls, unstable landforms, and stream initiation points; and buffering special aquatic sites such as seeps, springs, wetlands, and beaver ponds. The NOAA and the EPA recommend that Oregon consider riparian protection approaches similar to those that have addressed Coastal Nonpoint Program requirements in the neighboring coastal states.

Oregon has not yet provided sufficient information regarding additional management measures for landslide prone areas. ODF already requires management measures for protection of landslide prone areas that pose a risk to humans. A similar approach could be applied on high risk landslide prone areas to protect water quality and fisheries. Oregon could also consider adopting measures similar to the State of Washington's "Forests and Fish" rule provisions for protection of landslide prone areas.

A viable program for the protection of Oregon's landslide prone areas could include a process for identifying and designating high risk landslide prone areas. Factors such as slope and landform, sediment and wood delivery potential, and geologic factors should be used in the designation. Landscape scale mapping and analysis tools (e.g., LiDAR and DEMs) could help focus risk identification and designation efforts. An array of BMPs, including no harvest and thinning at various levels to maintain root strength and reduce precipitation impacts on soils, could be required in high risk areas based on factors such as delivery potential, the sensitivity of the aquatic resources, existing instream conditions, or other parameters. Oregon also may wish to consider an option to provide flexibility for forest land owners to rely on certified geologists or engineers to develop BMP options that provide equal or greater protection than the more broadly required measures. The program that Oregon develops to address landslide prone areas needs to address an adequate protection for both fish and nonfish bearing streams.

3) Feedback on the State's Progress in Meeting the New Development Condition on its Coastal Nonpoint Program

To address its remaining condition for new development, the ODEQ has proposed to:

- develop guidance, consistence with the new development 6217 (g) management measure, for TMDL Implementation Plan development for urban and rural residential areas within the Coastal Nonpoint Program management area boundary; and
- provide a strategy and schedule for completing and updating TMDL Implementation Plans to be consistent with that new guidance.

In its July 21, 2010 and July 26, 2010 letters to the EPA and the NOAA, the ODEQ explained its continuing progress and deliberate intention to complete actions according to the interim milestone deadlines identified by the EPA and the NOAA or as modified by the ODEQ. The deadlines identified by the EPA and the NOAA include: a final draft of the guidance by December 31, 2010, releasing the final guidance by June 30, 2011, and beginning to hold workshops for DMAs by June/July 2011. However, the ODEQ has not met any of these commitments. As the EPA and the NOAA notified the ODEQ in our July 23, 2012, comments, the draft *Guidance for TMDL Implementation Plan Development for Urban/Rural Residential Land Uses within the Coastal Nonpoint Management Area* (Implementation Guidance) that the ODEQ provided the EPA and the NOAA to review on June 29, 2012, still needs significant work.

While the EPA and the NOAA have been supportive of the potential for this Implementation Guidance approach to address the new development management measure requirements, we are very concerned that the deadlines have slipped significantly. In addition, based on our review of the July 2012 draft of the Implementation Guidance, it is still unclear whether the TMDL Implementation Plans developed under this Guidance would include practices consistent with the management measure for new development identified by the federal agencies under the Coastal Zone Act Reauthorization Amendments, as well as whether the ODEQ even has the authority to require implementation of the new development management measure, as needed (see comments the EPA and the NOAA provided to the ODEQ by email on July 23, 2012). The Implementation Guidance for urban areas might not enable Oregon to satisfy the new development management measure condition.

As the ODEQ finalizes the Implementation Guidance, it should provide unambiguous instruction to the DMAs that practices consistent with the new development management measure need to be incorporated into their TMDL Implementation Plans (i.e., practices that will reduce post-development total suspended solid (TSS) loadings by 80% or reduce TSS loadings so that the average annual TSS loads are no greater than predevelopment loadings, and maintain post-development peak runoff rate and average volume to pre-development levels). The federal agencies will review the Implementation Guidance to ensure that it clearly indicates that the ODEQ can ensure implementation of the new development management measure, as needed.

Based on staff communications, the EPA and the NOAA had understood that the Implementation Guidance would require Urban DMAs to include practices consistent with the new development measure within their TMDL Implementation Plans or, at a minimum, that the ODEQ would have the ability to require implementation of the recommended new development management measure. While states may rely on voluntary approaches, backed by enforceable authorities, to meet their Coastal Nonpoint Program requirements (see the EPA/NOAA 1998 *Final Administrative Changes Memo*), statements in Oregon's July 2012

draft Implementation Guidance appear to contradict Oregon's September 23, 2005, legal opinion asserting that the ODEQ does have authority to require implementation of the 6217(g) measures as necessary to control nonpoint source pollution. We urge the ODEQ to resolve this apparent discrepancy.

The EPA and the NOAA hope the ODEQ will expeditiously complete the *Guidance for TMDL Implementation Plan Development for Urban/Rural Residential Land Uses within the Coastal Nonpoint Management Area* and ensure that it clearly states that Urban DMAs need to include practices consistent with the new development measure and that the ODEQ has the ability to ensure, as needed, implementation of these practices. We strongly encourage the ODEQ to share a revised final draft of the guidance with the EPA and the NOAA for review as soon as possible so we can confirm that these requirements are met or provide recommendations for how the draft can be improved further.

4) *Feedback on the Oregon's Progress in Meeting the Onsite Sewage Disposal System (OSDS) Condition on its Coastal Nonpoint Program*

To address its remaining condition for OSDS, the ODEQ committed to develop rules to require point-of-sale inspections for systems within the Coastal Nonpoint Program management area. The EPA and the NOAA applaud Oregon's progress on rule development and the fact that Oregon was on target for meeting benchmarks set out in its July 21, 2010, and July 26, 2010, letters. On September 27, 2012, the ODEQ proposed rules to require all OSDSs within the Coastal Nonpoint Program management area to be inspected by a professional engineer, registered environmental health specialist, wastewater specialist or certified inspector at the time of property transfer and that the results of the inspection would be reported to the ODEQ. The State has also provided a sample inspection form that provides a detailed examination of the system beyond a simple visual inspection. The proposed rules requiring point-of-sale inspections and reliance on qualified inspectors, combined with the State's detailed inspection form, should enable the State to satisfy the OSDS condition if adopted as proposed.

The EPA and the NOAA are aware that the ODEQ has decided to delay presenting the proposed rules to the Oregon Environmental Quality Commission (EQC) for adoption until March 2013 to give the ODEQ more time to discuss the proposed rules with several State legislators. We recognize some additional time may be needed to address potential concerns. However, we strongly hope that the ODEQ will present the proposed rules to the EQC for adoption in March 2013. In addition, the EPA and the NOAA expect the ODEQ to ensure that significant changes to the proposed rules do not occur such that the rules would no longer enable Oregon to satisfy the remaining OSDS condition. If not, the EPA and the NOAA may not have everything they need by the end of June 2013 to fully approve Oregon's Coastal Nonpoint Program by November 15, 2013.